Birth and christening

As yet the child is nowhere at all; that is, it exists only in another world, — it is only «on its way», the stork has not even put it down, but what a number of anxieties it already causes! Will it be a boy or a girl?... Usually the man wishes for a son, the wife for a daughter. But mere wishing is no good; something has to be done about it. If the visitor is fond of the young farmer and wants to please him, he must put his hat on the bed, so that the newborn shall be a boy... But after all, whether it be fated to be a boy or a girl, the main thing is that it shall be «something». If a new wife pays a visit, they offer her bread, but not without saying: — «... I give you a part of its tail, so that you have a child; I peel it so that it shall be red, I cut it up so that it shall have curly hair...» It is a good sign if a glass of water is upset on the table and its contents flow towards the young woman: that means a baptism in the near future... Well, let us say that it is certain that «something» will happen, still the great question remains open: will it be a boy or a girl, trousers or skirts, a fillet or spurs; and what will «it» shout when «it» comes into this world, will its first screams be «o-iii o-iii» or «o-aaa o-aaa»? But there are good presages for all this if the young woman finds a pin, if she likes pipe smoke, or if she wishes to eat bacon, then it will be a boy; if she finds a needle, or if she longs for sugar and strawberries, then it will be a girl.

One cannot predict things, but there are enough reliable signs. Even so one has to be careful of every step... The young woman must not hide a leaf in her bosom, because a similar mark will show on the child's breast; fruit should not fall on her and, if it does, she must not make a sudden

11: Karolyi E-4, 5 (no date) 1931? EC1 Hungary EC1

796 its climax in the mystic dance round St Ivan's fire. In the open fields, under the stars, round St Ivan's fire made of fragrant woods and herbs, lovers are "sung together". There are a great number of St Ivan's songs in which this typical *motif* returns:

May God send a slow shower
To wash these two together,
Like two golden twigs...

796 777 Popular belief attaches much importance to this fire-dance, which is the first of the many acts in the developing of friendship and love between boy and girl which will come to a happy end in the merry marriages of Carnival. One after the other the girls jump across St Ivan's fire, while the rest, dancing round the fire, utter the name of the girl who is jumping, together with the name of the boy whom they know that their friend has taken to her heart. If the jump is successful, there remains no doubt that the desired union of two lovers will come true before the winter is over. Often this dance is an all-girl affair, as if to assure that every girl may unveil her heart's desire without embarrassment. Of course, the boys learn the happy news early enough....

241 527 Soon after, on the twenty-ninth of June, St Peter and St Paul's Day, the wheat-harvest begins. From the point of view of the Hungarian peasant this is the most critical and, everything considered, most important event of the year. To understand the magnitude of the event, it should be remembered that in the Hungary of today, as always in the past, the mainstay of the people has been the yield of the wheat-crop. The lives of millions of farmer-families, countless farm-hands, and share-croppers depend upon a bountiful harvest, and it is

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796 All Saints' Day, the first of November, is the time-limit for sowing the winter wheat, but St Martin's Day, on the eleventh, is important for more than one reason. The first frost and the first snow of the year are due on this day, whereupon the winter lights are lit for the first time, the stuffed geese yielding the delicious *foie gras* are killed, and it is also the time by which the grape-juice in the press-house has fermented and has turned into the new wine, just in time for the joyous St Martin's fairs.

777 796 Autumn slowly draws to its end. This means more leisure for the men and more work for the womenfolk, whose duty it is to utilize and preserve the products which the work of the men has created. These are also days of courtship, and from St Andrew's Day until Carnival, the girls are busy finding out by tricky little artifices who and what their future husbands will be. Molten lead poured into a pot of cold water will discover the occupation of the groom-to-be, while his name can be found out by hiding little slips of paper upon which names have been written in the dough of dumplings eaten with the evening meal.

St Lucia's Day, on the thirteenth of December, is another day when fortunes are told and omens are read. Groups of children known as "cacklers" go from house to house to wish the housewives great numbers of poultry and plenty of eggs:

> Lucia, Lucia, cackle, cackle,
> May your hens lay plenty of eggs,
> May your cow give plenty of milk,
> Lucia, Lucia, cackle, cackle . . .

If they are duly rewarded with food and sweets, the housewives should have no worries as to the fulfilment of the good wishes.